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SUBJECT: PRC SCHOLARS GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC ON SOUTHERN  
SUDAN REFERENDUM; DRAW PARALLELS TO DOMESTIC ETHNIC TENSIONS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.  
4 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: PRC scholars view the late-December passage of the Southern Sudan Referendum Law as "only the first step" in a long and difficult Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) implementation process. The scholars acknowledged that Southern Sudan will likely vote for independence in January 2011 and predicted additional referendum-related conflicts and violence, particularly in the North-South border areas. An MFA official said China would prefer for Sudan to remain united, and predicted that a Southern Sudan pro-secession vote would destabilize the region and threaten China's oil interests. PRC scholars drew comparisons between Sudan's North-South conflict and China's own ethnic tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang and cited this parallel as additional justification for China's preference for a unified Sudan. End Summary.

PRC: NCP was "Pressured" into the CPA  
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12. (C) PRC Africa scholars were subdued in their reaction to the Southern Sudan Referendum Law that was finally approved by Sudan's National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) December 29. Wang Suolao, Associate Professor in the School of International Studies at Peking University (PKU), told PolOff January 7 that the passage of the referendum law merely "opened the door" to a long and difficult journey ahead and that full implementation of the CPA remained "far off." The NCP had been "pressured" into the CPA, Wang suggested, because the Sudan government had been unable to "get a handle" on the Southern Sudan rebels. The NCP also had external pressures from the European Union and the United States and feared "serious consequences" had it not agreed to the CPA. Wang claimed that U.S. and Western countries' "black and white" approach to Sudan -- labeling President Bashir and the NCP as the "bad guys" at the same time encouraging Southern Sudan's independence -- placed the PRC in a difficult position. He said that ideologically, the PRC supported a unified Sudan but also recognized that Chinese oil interests were located in the South. As a result, he concluded, the PRC had to "keep one foot in each boat" and maintain "friendly" relations with all sides.

PRC Ethnic Tensions Parallel Sudan's  
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13. (C) Professor Wang stated that China would "absolutely prefer" for Sudan to remain a unified country. Comparing Sudan's situation with China, Wang noted that China was also a country with many ethnic minorities, and each successful ethnic independence movement abroad made the central government "more nervous." Separately concurring with Wang's

assessment, Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations Institute of Asian and African Studies Research Professor Zeng Qiang told PolOff January 12 that China's ethnic tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang, like ethnic- and religion-based conflicts elsewhere, were identity driven and therefore almost impossible to resolve. To keep groups with fundamentally different values together required either a strong central government or a common economic market, and neither was present in Sudan, Zeng concluded.

#### NPC and SPLM Have Different Goals

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14. (C) The NCP and SPLM had different priorities at the moment, MFA West Asian and North African Affairs Department North Africa Division Attache Yu Chunhua told PolOff January 8, stating that the North was preoccupied with the April elections while the South was focused on the 2011 referendum. The SPLM was "indifferent" toward the April elections because it wanted to focus on the referendum. Yu predicted that after the April elections, the NCP would turn its attention back to the referendum and concentrate on creating "technical road blocks" to impede the referendum. Yu anticipated an increase in North-South violence, particularly in the border areas as the referendum drew closer.

#### China's Oil Interest

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15. (C) Yu expected Southern Sudan's independence to result in  
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a domino effect and create further instability for the region, particularly in Darfur. He stressed that above all else, the PRC wanted "security and stability," both domestically and abroad. China preferred a unified Sudan because Southern Sudan's separation and the resultant regional instability would have a negative impact on PRC's oil interest in the region, he added.

16. (C) Zhang Yongpeng, Deputy Director for the Institute of West Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), offered a more sanguine view of the situation, telling PolOff January 13 that regardless of the referendum outcome, Sudan was dependent on support from foreign oil companies. Southern Sudan's oil fields could not operate without Chinese oil companies' financial support and technical expertise, and would need to cooperate with the Chinese whatever the outcome of the referendum.

#### China's Relationship with Bashir

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17. (C) PRC scholars agreed that President Bashir would be reelected in April as president of Sudan, although they predicted a difficult election for him. PKU's Wang suggested that Bashir would have to appease hardliners in the North and take a harsher position toward Southern Sudan in order to stay in power. Given China's relationship with Bashir, the PRC would be "embarrassed" if the NCP decided to contest Southern Sudan's independence. Wang insisted that although Western countries strongly disliked the Sudanese President, Bashir remained crucial to the implementation of the CPA. CASS' Zhang maintained that China supported an open and fair election process in Sudan and had contributed USD 4 million to assist with the elections. Zhang stressed it was important for China to uphold its principle of non-interference and provide assistance to Sudan without interfering with its domestic politics.

HUNTSMAN